The Problem of Evil

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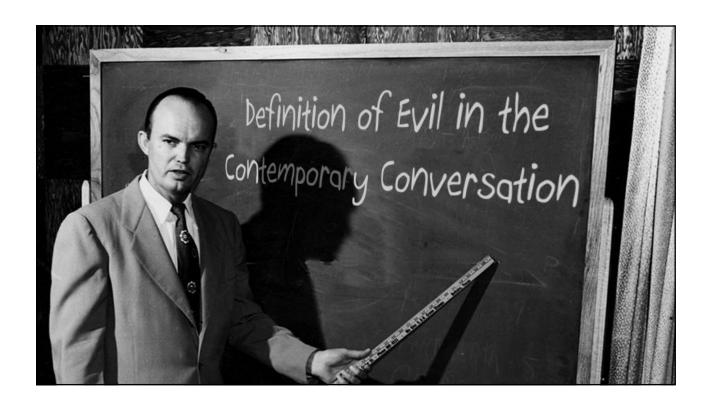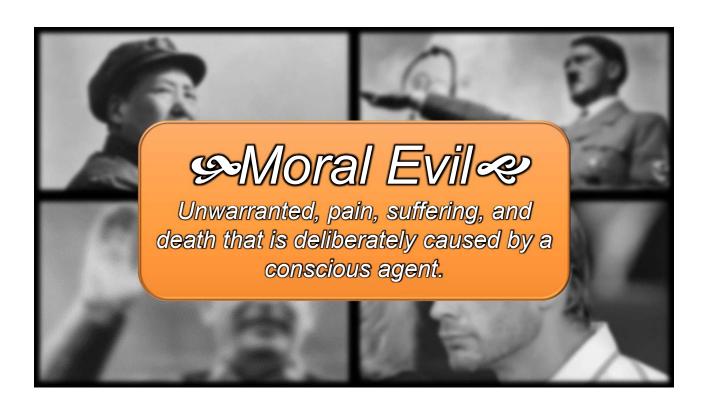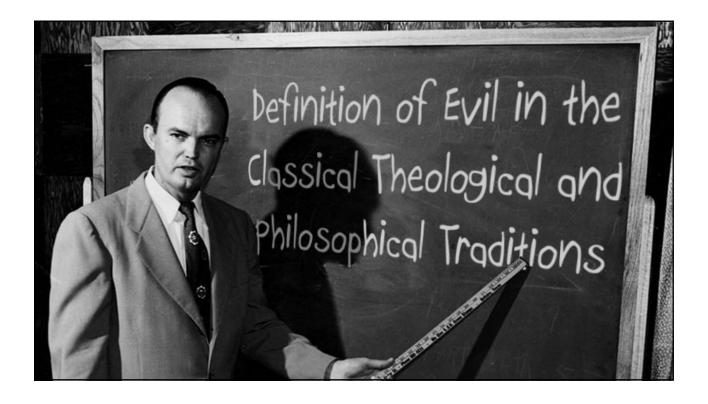Southern Evangelical Seminary

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Definitions of Evil
Different "Problems" of Evil
Formulating the Problem of Evil
Some Non-Evangelical Options
Some Evangelical Options
Summary of the Classical Approach

Definition of Evil in the Contemporary Conversation

❧Natural Evil☙

Unwarranted, pain, suffering, and death that is not caused by any conscious agent.

Moral Evil

Unwarranted, pain, suffering, and death that is deliberately caused by a conscious agent.

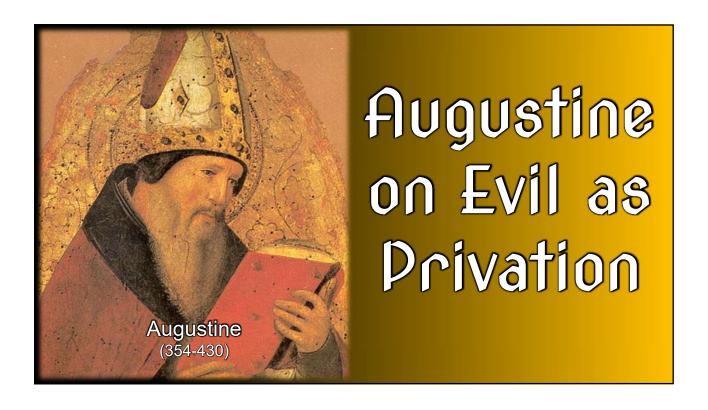Definition of Evil in the Classical Theological and Philosophical Traditions

*If God created all things and
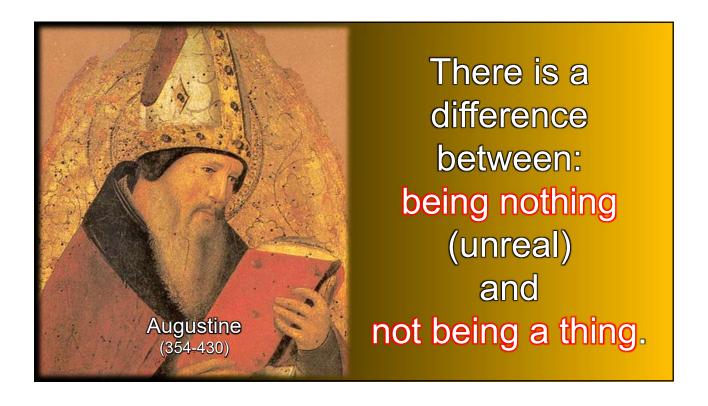evil is something,
then God created evil.*

*If God did not create evil,
then it would seem either:*
evil is unreal
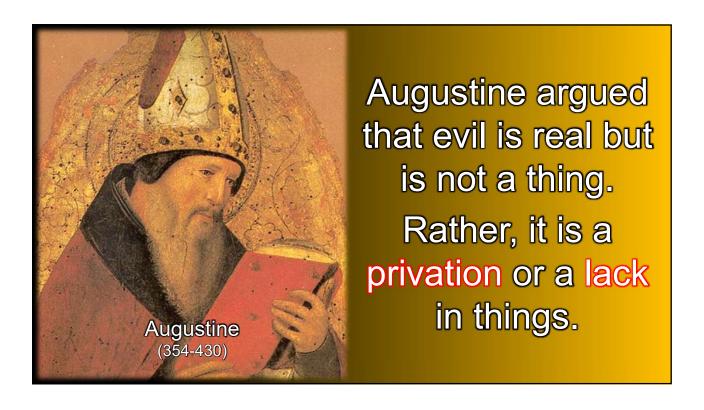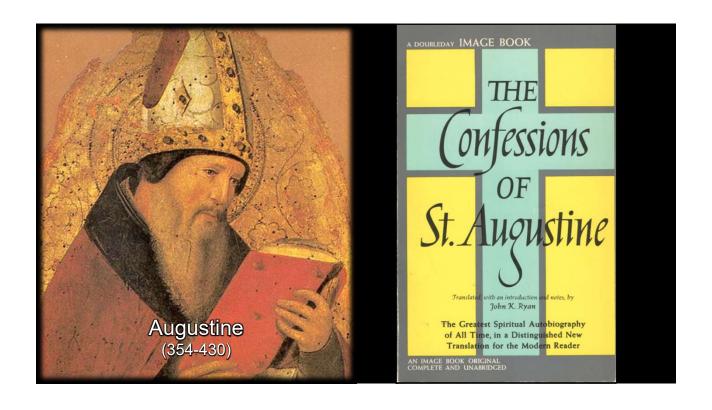*or*
evil is not a thing.

Augustine on Evil as Privation

Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)
and
not being a thing.

Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine argued that evil is real but is not a thing.

Rather, it is a privation or a lack in things.

Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine
(354-430)

A DOUBLEDAY IMAGE BOOK

THE Confessions OF St. Augustine

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"... evil is only the privation of a good ..."

[Augustine, *Confessions* III, 7, §12, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 85. *malum non esse nisi privationem boni*]

Augustine
(354-430)

"Evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled by its origin to possess and which it ought to have."

[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 7, §2, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Pt. 1, 48]

Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

privation

Blindness is the privation of sight.

But blindness is not a thing in itself.

A rock cannot see, but it is not blind because it "ought" not be able to see.

negation

Different "problems" of Evil

The Logical Problem of Evil

the logical problem of evil is notion that the propositions

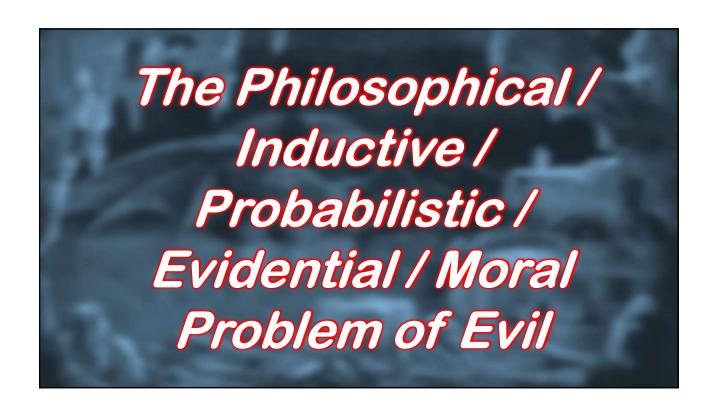*"God exists"*
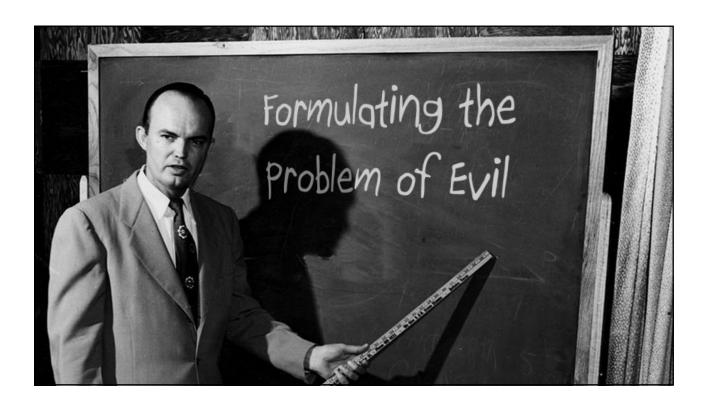
and

"Evil exists"

are logically incompatible

With very few exceptions, the consensus among contemporary philosophers is that there is no logical problem of evil.

The Pastoral Problem of Evil

The pastoral problem of evil address the emotional and practical ways of managing the personal experience of suffering in one's life.

The Philosophical Problem of Evil

The Philosophical / Inductive / Probabilistic / Evidential / Moral Problem of Evil

Formulating the Problem of Evil

✎ Premise 1 ✎

*If God is all good (omnibenevolent),
He would prevent evil.*

✎ Premise 2 ✎

*If God is all powerful (omnipotent),
He could prevent evil.*

✍ Premise 3 ✍

If God knew in advance that creation would fall into sin He would have either:

left well enough alone and not created in the first place

taken steps to prevent the occurrence of evil

❧ Premise 4 ❧

*There is evil, i.e. evil
is not prevented.*

❧ Conclusions ❧

*Either evil does not exist
or God is not all-good
or God is not all-powerful (or both)
or God is not all-knowing
or God does not exist.*

❧ Conclusions ❧

**Either evil does not exist
or God is not all-good
or God is not all-powerful (or both)
or God is not all-knowing
or God does not exist.**
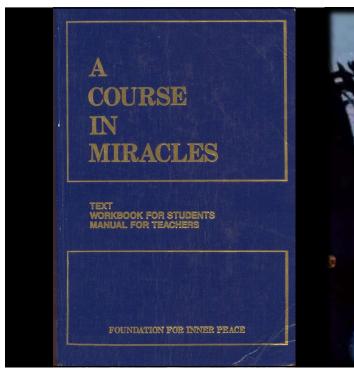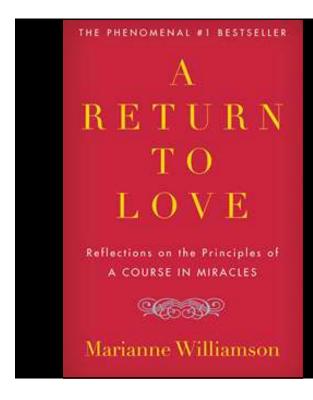
Evil does not exist.

God is not all-good.

God is not all-powerful.

God is not all-knowing.

God does not exist.

Evil does not exist.

A
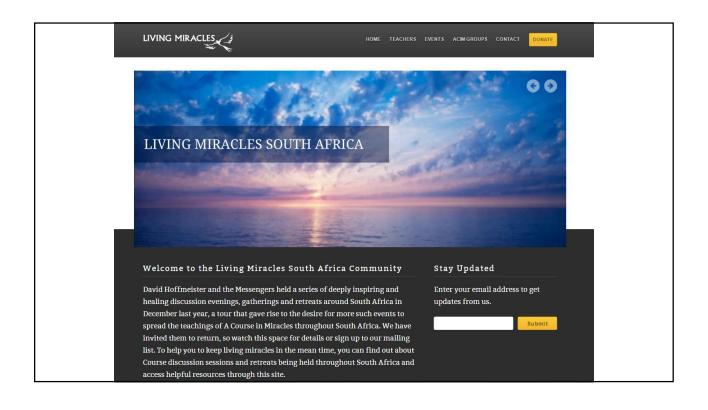COURSE
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WORKBOOK FOR STUDENTS
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FOUNDATION FOR INNER PEACE

Helen Schucman
(1909-1981)

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Date:
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Author:
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By Simone Cox, South Africa

Note from Tamara Wood – Urantia Foundation Coordinator for the South African Initiative:

A project to place over 1000 Urantia Books across Southern Africa has been sponsored by many individuals within the reader community and carried out by Mark Bloomfield. The project began in June when the first shipment of 500 books was received by Mark in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Since then 700 books have been gratefully accepted by public libraries, universities and religious institutions as indicated by the many thank you letters Urantia Foundation has received.

Mark has covered a lot of territory within South Africa and has also placed books in Namibia and Botswana. Currently, he is en route to Mombassa, Kenya where 300 books will be arriving for additional library placement. After this round, Mark will return to South Africa to receive one more shipment of 300 books in order to complete this phase of his mission.

The Trustees and Staff extend their thanks to the reader community for participating in this service of making our treasured text available to so many individuals across Southern Africa.

On behalf of the budding Urantia community in South Africa, kindly allow me to express our gratitude and appreciation for the wonderful work you are doing in service of the fifth epochal revelation, our Christ Michael and our beloved planet, and for your generous contributions to our own efforts.

As a spiritually progressive country, South Africa is thirsty for the rich blessing of the Urantia teachings. Not only will we benefit greatly from the books seeded into our local libraries, but we also enjoy upliftment and encouragement from your loving prayers and kind support.
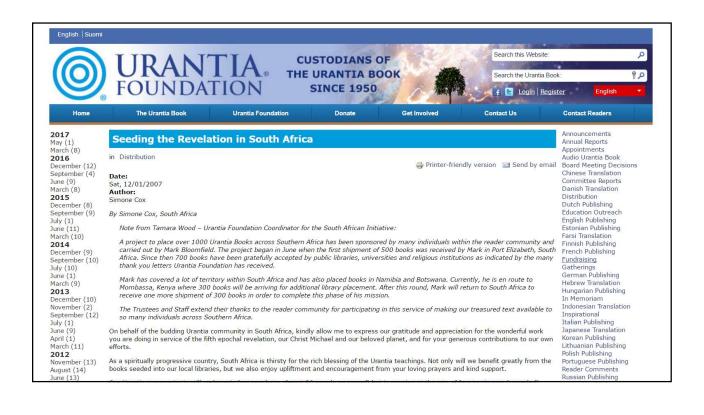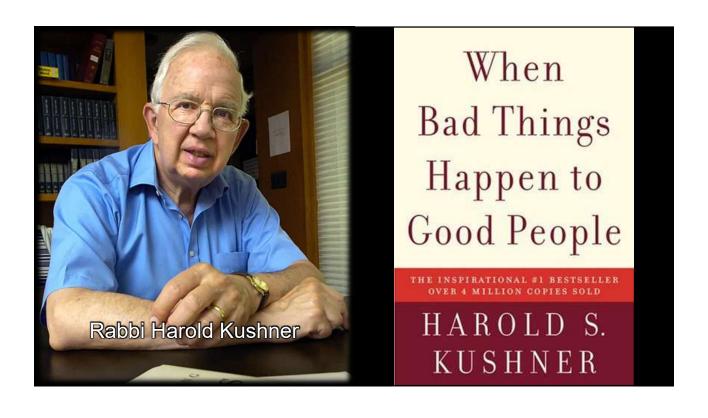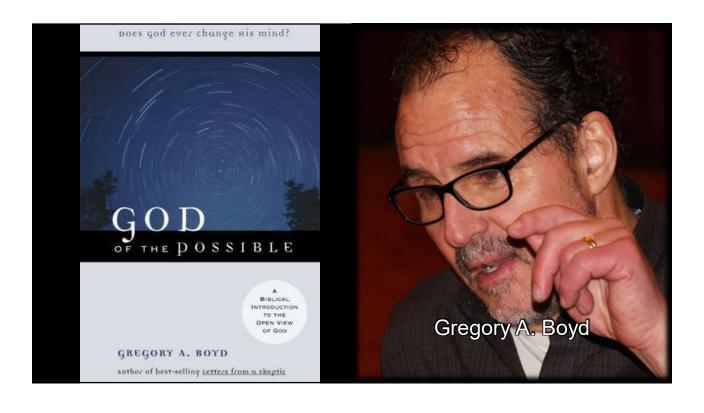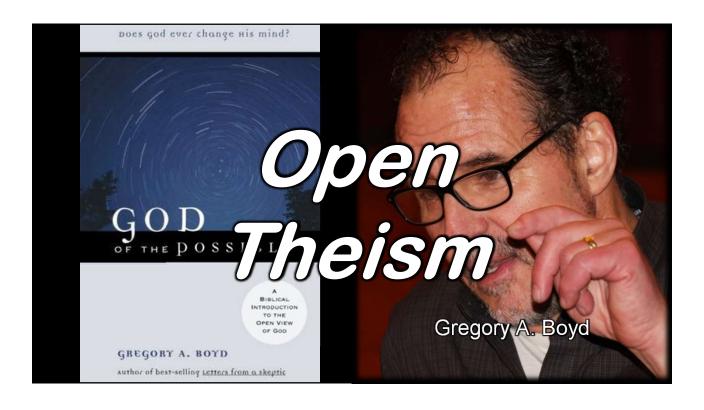
God is not all-good.

Greek Polytheism held that there were both good and evil gods and explained evil in the world by the evil among the gods.
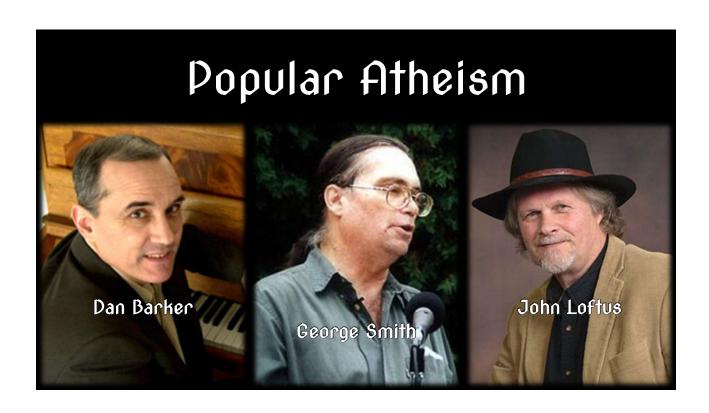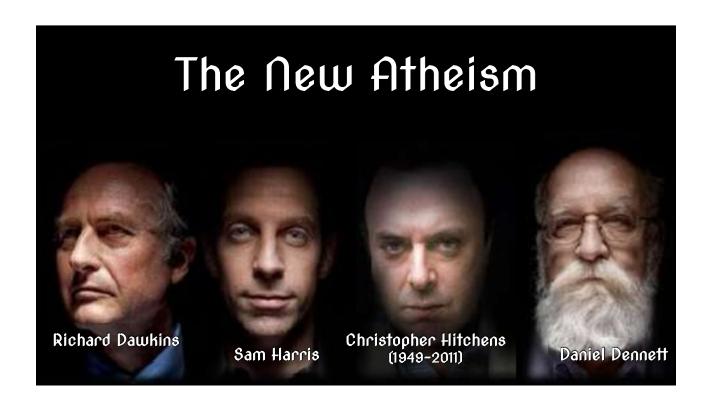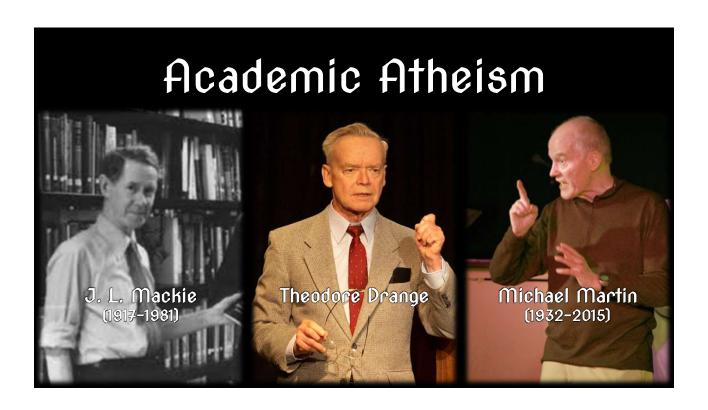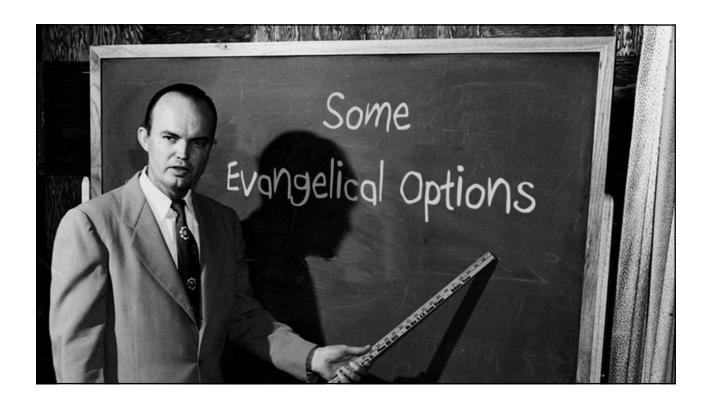
God is not all-powerful.

Rabbi Harold Kushner

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

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God is not all-knowing.

Gregory A. Boyd

Open Theism

Gregory A. Boyd

God does not exist.

Popular Atheism

Dan Barker

George Smith

John Loftus

The New Atheism

Richard Dawkins

Sam Harris

Christopher Hitchens
(1949-2011)

Daniel Dennett

Academic Atheism

J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

Theodore Drange

Michael Martin
(1932-2015)

Some Evangelical Options

The Free Will Defense

God, Freedom, and Evil — ALVIN C. PLANTINGA

Alvin C. Plantinga

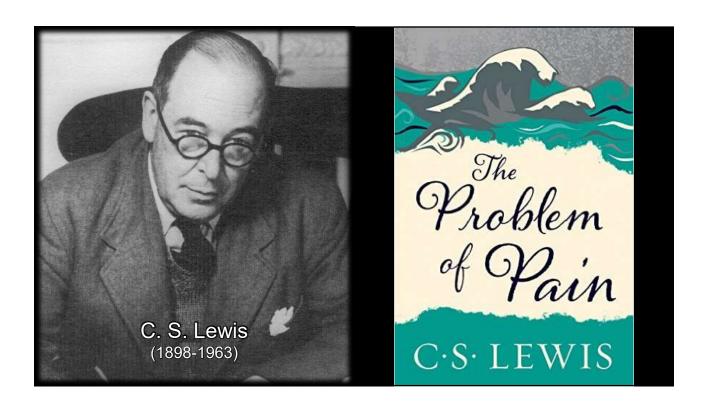DIVINE WILL AND HUMAN CHOICE — Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought — RICHARD A. MULLER

Richard A. Muller

The Natural Order Defense of C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

The
Problem
of *Pain*

C·S· LEWIS

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

"Fixed laws, consequences unfolding by causal necessity, the whole natural order, are at once the limits within which their common life is confined and also the sole condition under which any such life is possible.

"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."

[*The Problem of Pain* (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), 22]

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis's Natural Order Defense

➤ *God created humans with free will.*

➤ *The responsible exercise of free will requires a world of non-capricious physical regularities (laws).*
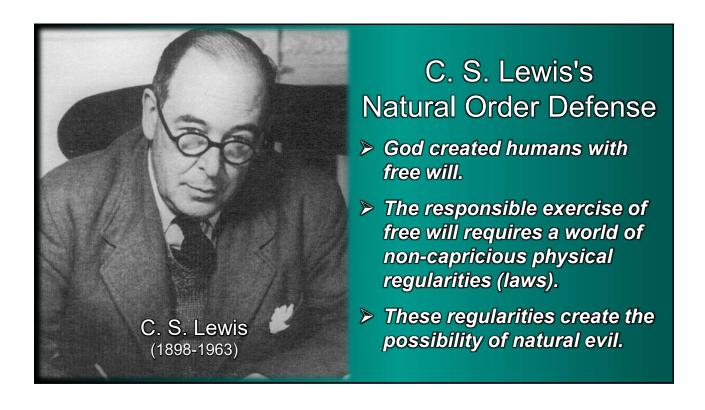
➤ *These regularities create the possibility of natural evil.*
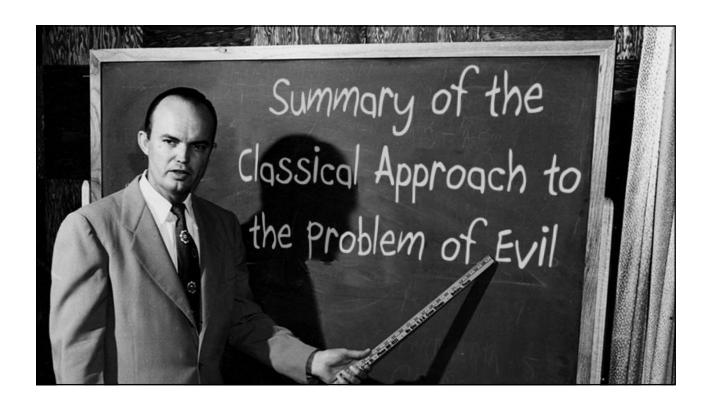
C. S. Lewis
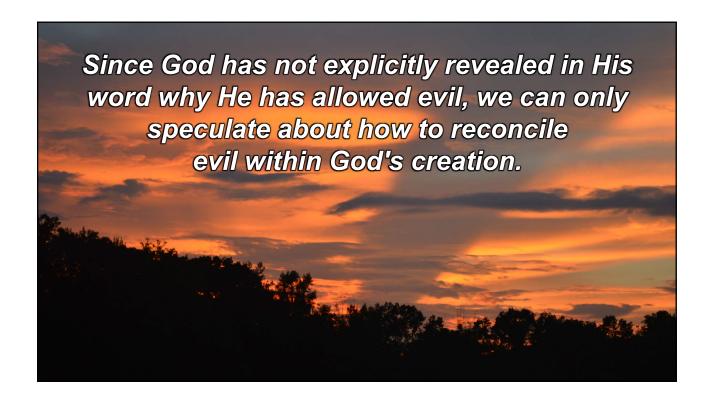(1898-1963)

Consideration of the Afterlife

Since it is most often the Christian who is challenged with the problem of evil, it behooves the Christian to cull from the entire Christian world view in responding.
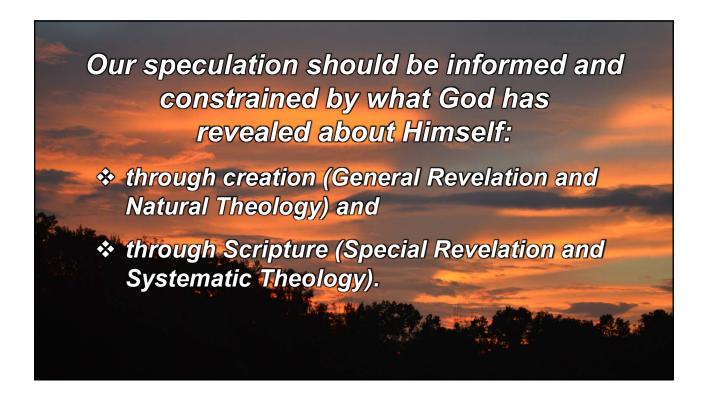
➢ *In the consummation of history, all will be good.*

➢ *All moral goods will be rewarded. (which is good)*

➢ *All moral evils will be punished. (which is good)*
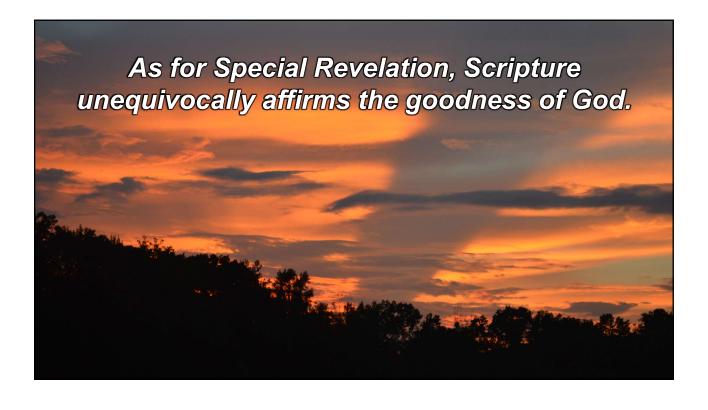
"While it might be easy to imagine what we would do if we had God's power, it is impossible to know what we would do if we had God's knowledge."

Doug Geivett

Summary of the Classical Approach to the Problem of Evil

Since God has not explicitly revealed in His word why He has allowed evil, we can only speculate about how to reconcile evil within God's creation.

Our speculation should be informed and constrained by what God has revealed about Himself:

❖ *through creation (General Revelation and Natural Theology) and*

❖ *through Scripture (Special Revelation and Systematic Theology).*

As for Special Revelation, Scripture unequivocally affirms the goodness of God.

ᔥ **Nahum 1:7** ᔥ

The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.

ᔥ **1 Chronicles 16:34** ᔥ

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

❧ **Psalm 25:8** ❧

Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore, He teaches sinners
in the way.

❧ **Psalm 34:8** ❧

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is
good; Blessed is the man
who trusts in Him!

❧ Psalm 100:5 ☙

For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.

Of course, this observation is not exclusive to the Classical position.

As for General Revelation, the Classical position puts great emphasis on Natural Theology.

Natural Theology is that body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes that can be acquired by human reason as it carefully attends itself to God's revelation of Himself in Creation.
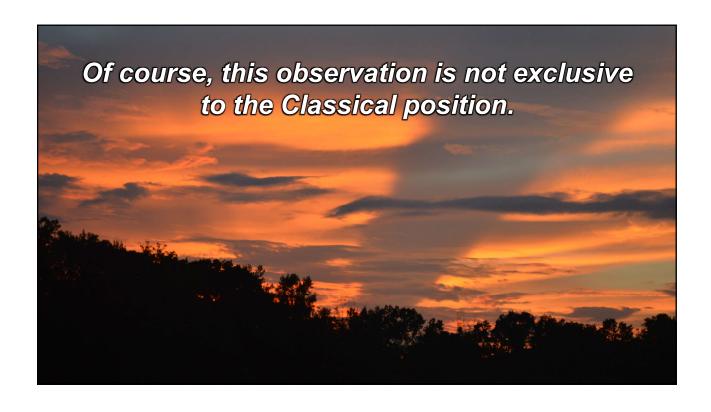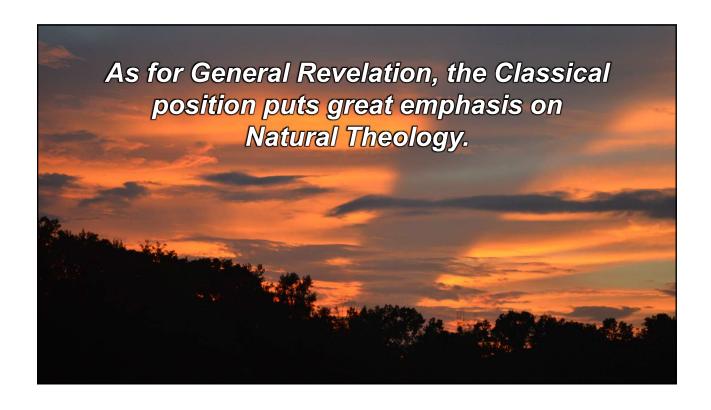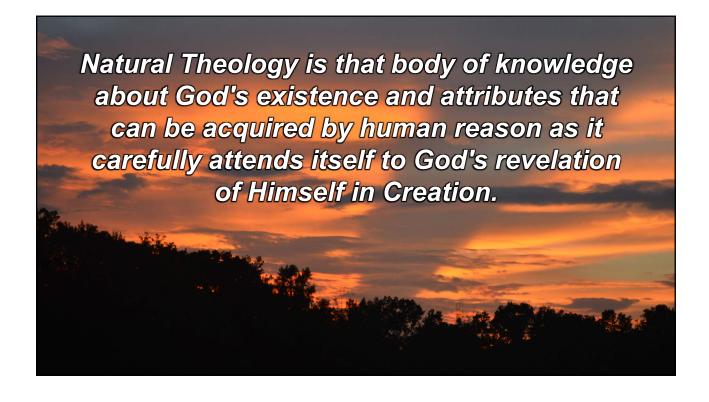
For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead …

Rom. 1:20a

The Classical tradition maintains can God's attributes can be rationally demonstrated.
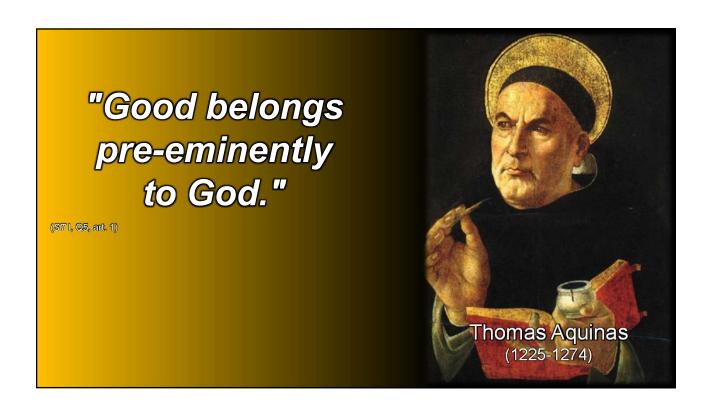
Unfortunately for me (but perhaps fortunately for you) we do not have the time for this demonstration here.
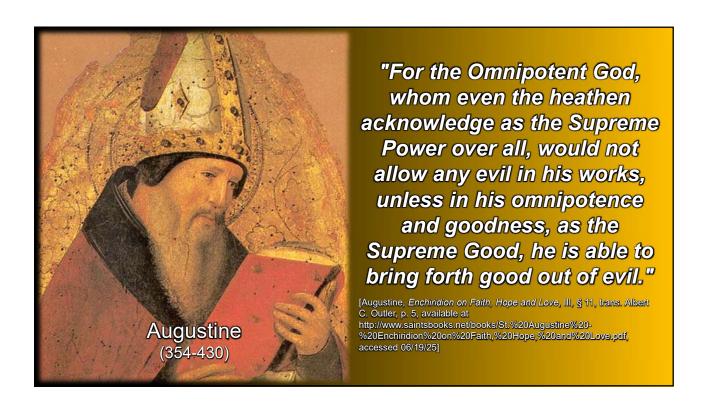
One can find such a demonstration in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae.

The rationally demonstrable body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes is known as Natural Theology.
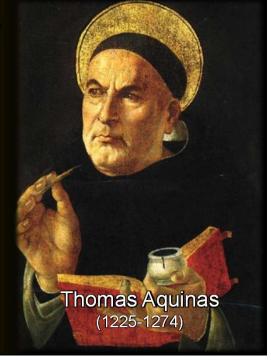
Included among those attributes are God's infinite goodness an omnipotence.

We know God is all good and all powerful even when we cannot demonstrate the connection between specific evils in the world and the specific goods that God might produce from them.

"Good belongs pre-eminently to God."

(*ST* I, Q5, art. 1)

Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil."

[Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, III, § 11, trans. Albert C. Outler, p. 5, available at http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Augustine%20-%20Enchiridion%20on%20Faith,%20Hope,%20and%20Love.pdf, accessed 06/19/25]

Augustine
(354-430)

"*As Augustine says 'Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil in his works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.' This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.*"

[ST, I, Q2, art. 3, ad. 1]

Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Conclusion

In the contemporary discussion, evil is commonly distinguished as natural evil and moral evil.

In the Classical tradition, while not rejecting this distinction, goes on to define evil, not as a thing in itself, but as a privation of goodness in things.

Solutions to the problem of evil seek to address both the contemporary discussion and the Classical tradition.

Some approaches to the problem of evil are incompatible with Evangelical Christianity.

There are approach to the problem of evil that are compatible with biblical Christianity broadly considered and with Classical Christing theism more narrowly.

Resources

A New Way to Think About the Question

If God, Why Evil?

NORMAN L. GEISLER

on evil

St. Thomas Aquinas

TRANSLATED BY
JOHN A. OESTERLE AND
JEAN T. OESTERLE

Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

THOMAS
AQUINAS
on
GOD
and
EVIL

BRIAN DAVIES

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY
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GOD AND EVIL

IN THE THEOLOGY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS

FOREWORD BY
TERRY EAGLETON

HERBERT McCABE

Herbert McCabe
(1926-2001)

Thank you!